

# Fellows, Fellowship & Organization Development

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*Fellowship Organizations serve as critical intermediaries between communities, institutions, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Fellows, essential to these organizations, work in the field for one to two years, addressing local challenges, systemic issues, and policy implementation. Their strategies and results are shared with stakeholders, yet these organizations face constraints like limited funding, research capacity, and impact assessment tools. This study explores fellows' motivations and perceptions of organizational ecosystems, with data gathered from seven fellowship organizations and 22 ex-fellows through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Using the 'theory of change' framework, the analysis identified motivations such as self-transformation, life-purpose exploration, job dissatisfaction, and a drive to engage with nontraditional organizations. Thematic analysis revealed 13 organizational factors, including culture, diversity, inclusivity, and value alignment.*

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## Introduction

The widening gap between sustainable development indicators and ground realities is driven by weakened democratic governance, rising capitalism, geopolitical power struggles, and the exploitation of natural resources for wealth accumulation. These dynamics have strained the relationship between citizens, the State, and institutions, exacerbating vulnerabilities among marginalized populations. While civil society organizations, researchers, and state institutions highlight these disparities, their efforts are limited by sustainability challenges (Sen, 2009). To achieve sustainable development, alternative institutional frameworks are needed. Based on literature and stakeholder discussions, fellowship organizations are proposed as a parallel structure, facilitating the transformation of communities and institutions to bridge the gap between current realities and sustainable development goals (Kumar & Gupta, 2019). fellow-

ship organizations often face significant financial and non-financial support deficiencies from funding agencies and the state, along with limitations in research capacity and outcome measurement across societal levels.

Fellows are central to fellowship organizations, spending one to two years in the field to gain firsthand experience of field realities, systemic gaps, community participation, and policy challenges. They experiment with various models to maximize impact, documenting and sharing results with communities, funders, and government representatives. This process helps fellows discover their passions, leading to careers in social entrepreneurship, academia, research, corporate roles, or development consultancy. Despite their unique activities, fellowship organizations often face significant financial and non-financial support deficiencies from funding agencies and the state, along with limitations in research capacity and outcome measurement across societal levels.

### **Literature Review**

Governments globally are prioritizing sustainability through the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at fostering economic growth (Panda et al., 2018a). However, the State has consistently underperformed due to bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, favoritism, and complex social dynamics (Chatterjee, 2015b), resulting in a widening gap between current and expected SDG indicators. This failure has led to negative

outcomes such as increased inequality, poor health services, a trust deficit, limited opportunities, low-quality livelihoods, disrupted social fabric, and increased migration (Sen, 2009). Additionally, the interconnected nature of SDGs means that the failure of one can undermine overall sustainability efforts (Hák et al., 2016).

State interventions aimed at assisting vulnerable populations often fail to achieve long-term impact due to design flaws, the motives of implementers, lack of political will, and social dynamics (Khan, 2016). Efforts to improve developmental indicators typically occur through direct state intervention, corporate social responsibility (CSR) investments, and initiatives by individuals and non-state organizations. However, the impact of individual and civil society initiatives is often limited in scale and sustainability (Basu, 2020). The emergence of fellowship organizations in India plays a vital role in fostering long-term, scalable change.

The concept of fellowship organizations has roots in ancient Indian educational practices, where students (shishyas) lived with their teachers (gurus) in a communal setting, fostering holistic learning and ethical values necessary for addressing societal challenges (Kumar, 2013). In contrast, the modern education system has become more formalized, limiting student-teacher interaction and widening the gap between current and expected developmental indicators. However, new organizations are emerging to address these disparities,

rebuild trust between the state and communities, and engage youth committed to driving change (Sharma, 2019). Field data identify four types of fellowships<sup>1</sup>: (a) Academic research Fellowships, (b) Study fellowships, (c) Work fellowships, and (d) Resident fellowship programs (Rao, 2021; Gupta, 2018).

Crucible moments and significant life experiences act as transformative events, shaping an individual's personal and professional trajectory (Tavernier & Willoughby, 2012). These experiences often lead to a deeper sense of meaning and a desire to engage in social initiatives (Thompson et al., 2000), which individuals find both fulfilling and satisfying (Marmo & Berkman, 2018). In seeking to address unmet societal needs, individuals are drawn to fellowship organizations that align with their personal values and aspirations for social change.

A fellowship organization can be described as “a formal institution made up of sectoral experts, which brings scientific rigor to the approach and processes, adopted by ‘fellows’, locals, and state representatives for improvements in life

and overall ecosystem”. A “fellow<sup>2</sup>” is an individual, who understands the interlinkages and impact created in one sector on others; transform self, society and formal system to make an ecosystem sustainable. A ‘fellowship’ is defined as “offering an environment to the individual when get immersed, transforms the ecosystem and becomes an entity in itself”.

**An exemplary Indian fellowship organization integrates various functions, ensuring alignment with field realities for effective interventions.**

The alignment between a fellow's social initiative goals and the fellowship organization's philosophy is essential for organizational success. Organizations fostering a democratic culture, emphasizing individual agency, participation, and shared values, are more effective in creating this alignment (Markopoulos & Vanharanta, 2015). Pursuing social initiatives as a career involves designing and implementing change models, and promoting the emergence of community leaders. This transformative process, from personal challenges to social leadership, underscores the critical role of fellowship organizations in developing future change-makers. An exemplary Indian fellowship organization integrates various functions, ensuring alignment with field realities for effective interventions, par-

<sup>1</sup> (a) Academic research fellowships are institution-funded opportunities designed for conducting research in specific areas, accompanied by a monetary award; (b) Study fellowships, typically classroom-based programs funded at the institutional level; (c) Work fellowships, which provide guided employment through structured programs that support multiple fellows; and (d) Resident fellowship programs, where fellows live and immerse themselves in experiential learning within developmental contexts, applying their knowledge to address community issues (Rao, 2021; Gupta, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Fellows engage in research, co-design interventions, implement field-based solutions, document changes, and ensure sustainability by transferring work to subsequent cohorts (Raina & Pundir, 2019).

ticularly in sectors requiring urgent attention to meet SDG goals.

Fellowship organizations collaborate with government representatives and receive sponsorship from state, corporate, and individual donors. Funders, community members, and fellowship organizations actively engage in the design, development, implementation, and assessment of interventions, as well as the replication of change models aligned with fellowship objectives. Scholars such as Rao (2020) and Patel & Sharma (2019) highlight exemplary work by Indian organizations in education (transforming rural government schools) and health (raising awareness of communicable and non-communicable diseases). These organizations also address key sub-indicators, including poverty, urbanization, food security, healthcare affordability, maternal and child mortality, education access, skill development, and natural resource management.

These organizations empower fellows to drive sustainable transformation (Kumar & Gupta, 2019). Fellows engage in understanding field realities, systemic gaps, stakeholder roles, policy challenges, and change indicators while fostering community participation and personal transformation. By exploring strategies for impact maximization, fellows document and present their outcomes to the community, funders, and state representatives. This process helps them discover their strengths and passions, leading to diverse career paths in social entrepreneurship, academia, research, corporate roles, and development consultancy.

In India, approximately 22 organizations offer fellowship programs focused on 12 of the 17 SDGs. Of these, 30% are public sector units, 30% are corporate houses, 30% are CSOs, and the remaining are Universities. Notably, 50% of organizations focus on SDG 4: Quality Education, 25% on SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, 20% on SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, and 20% on SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being. The duration of fellowships ranges from 3 months to 5 years, with most lasting 1 year. These organizations foster alignment between fellows' values and organizational missions, enhancing job satisfaction and motivation (Hackler & Saxton, 2007).

### **Conceptual framework**

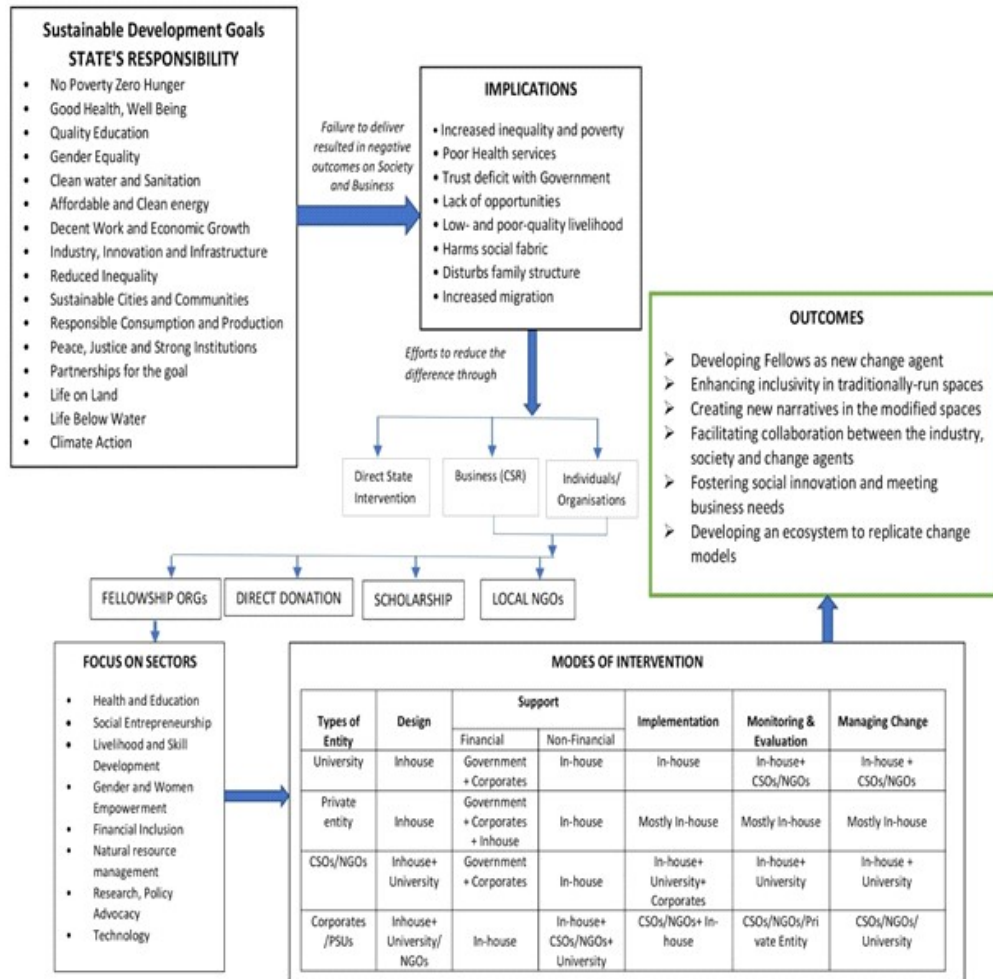
This conceptual framework examines the emergence of fellowship organizations in India and their role in addressing gaps in sustainable development indicators. It highlights the involvement of multiple stakeholders, agencies, and fellows as change agents at both systemic and community levels, structured into four phases, as shown in Fig. 1.

#### **(1) Implications due to gaps in the present development indicators**

Governments worldwide are working to achieve SDGs (Panda et al., 2018a), but their efforts are often hindered by unfavorable social and political conditions, creating a gap between current and expected outcomes. This failure has negative repercussions, as

the interlinked nature of SDGs means setbacks in one area can disrupt the entire ecosystem. (2) *Efforts to reduce the existing gaps*

Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework of Indian Fellowship Organizations



Source: Field Data

State programs are typically broad in scope to cater to diverse populations, yet they struggle with applicability due to demographic and social heterogeneity (Chatterjee, 2015c). Current interventions are implemented through direct state interventions, CSR, individuals and NGOs (Kumar & Gupta, 2019). Notably, CSR and non-state actors play a significant role often outperforming state interventions in terms of long-term impact and adaptability (Basu, 2020).

*(3) Emergence and design of fellowship organizations*

Fellowship programs in India address various SDGs, with some focusing on specific areas and others covering multiple sectors. These programs are offered by universities, private entities, CSOs/NGOs, and corporate/public sector units, with variations in stipend, field support, and outcome measurement depending on the host entity. The design of these programs includes factors such as duration, pedagogy, field-based content, stakeholder management, evaluation, and funding. This research focuses on governance, content design, and funding. Universities and private entities tend to manage fellowships internally, while CSOs/NGOs rely on significant support from universities and governments. Corporate and public sector units typically have in-house teams but collaborate with universities and NGOs for program design and monitoring. Implementation, evaluation, and change management practices also differ, with universities and private entities handling these internally, while CSOs and corporations partner with external organizations (Srinivas & Patel, 2020).

*(4) Impact created by these organisations*

The development of fellows as transformative agents involves equipping them with critical skills, knowledge, and training to drive societal change, including leadership, problem-solving, and cognitive frameworks (Mezirow, 2000; Brookfield, 2017). Engaging underrepresented groups is crucial for shaping policies and practices (Sen, 2009). Collaboration be-

tween industry, society, and emerging change agents is essential for fostering multi-sector partnerships that leverage resources and expertise (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012; Selsky & Parker, 2005). Aligning social innovation with business objectives creates models that address societal challenges and market needs (Mulgan, 2012). Establishing an ecosystem for scaling successful change models requires frameworks and support systems to facilitate the adoption of proven strategies (Westley & Antadze, 2010).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research adopts the ‘theory of change’ framework (Brest, 2010), widely used in sectors like business, philanthropy, non-profits, and government to facilitate social change. It defines long-term goals and traces backward to identify the necessary preconditions for their achievement, mapping causal linkages between actions and their outcomes at different stages. Each outcome is logically connected, with causal links explained by “rationale”—the reasoning behind the sequential process (Taplin & Clark, 2012). The theory is applicable at any project stage, drawing on program documentation, stakeholder collaboration, and outcome reviews. Its iterative nature allows for continuous evaluation and adaptation of strategies.

### **Research Methodology**

This exploratory study examines organizations offering fellowship programs, selected based on their contributions to addressing gaps in specific

SDGs, as well as their type, size, and geographical scope. The primary objectives are to understand fellows' motivations for joining these organizations and their perceptions of the organizational ecosystem, systems, and processes. A 'theory of change' framework was adopted to capture respondents' views. Respondents were selected based on two criteria: graduate + fellowship and postgraduate + fellowship. The sample includes respondents from the following organizations: one corporate house (5 respondents), one public sector organization (3 respondents), one university (3 respondents), and four civil society organizations (10 respondents), a total of 22 former fellows/employees across seven organizations.

Data was collected through a semi-structured interview schedule, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches via in-depth telephonic interviews. Secondary data sources, including organizational websites, reports, newspaper articles, unpublished articles, and white papers, were also used. Interviews were transcribed and manually coded, with key themes identified through line-by-line analysis. Formal consent was obtained from all participants. Due to the small sample size and non-probability sampling, the findings cannot be generalized to a larger population.

### **Respondent's Demographic Characteristics**

The present study examines seven organizations with 22 fellows. Demographic data (Table 1) reveal an average

age of 26.4 years, ranging from 21 to 31. Gender distribution shows that 73% of fellows are males and 27% are females. Approximately 41% of fellows come from metropolitan or Tier 1<sup>3</sup> cities, 36% from Tier 2<sup>4</sup> cities, and 23% from Tier 3<sup>5</sup> cities.

Primary data on religious affiliation shows that 68% of fellows identify as Hindu, 14% as Muslim, 5% as Buddhist, 5% as Socialist, and 9% did not disclose their religion. Regarding social category, 59% belong to the General category, 9% to Other Backward Classes, and 32% chose not to reveal their category. Educationally, one-third hold a postgraduate degree, and two-thirds have completed undergraduate education, with 55% studying engineering, 9% law, 5% medicine, 5% finance, 9% science, 9% arts, and 9% public relations. Family literacy levels influence the decision to join a fellowship, with most fellows coming from families with at least one graduate. Regarding work experience, 64% of fellows have an average of 13 months of prior experience, primarily in IT (42.8%), the social sector (21.4%), health (7%), legal (14.2%), and manufacturing (14.2%). Their roles included associates (35.7%), analysts (21.4%), technology consultants (7%), project engineers (14%), and one each as a product design engineer and fellow.

### **Reasons of Entry**

<sup>3</sup> Here, Tier 1 cities are Delhi, Calcutta, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, and Chennai.

<sup>4</sup> Here, Tier 2 cities are Jhansi, Coimbatore, Nagpur, Warangal, and Meerut.

<sup>5</sup> Here, Tier 3 cities are Darjeeling, Baghalkot, Satara, and Khurja.

**Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Fellows (Respondents)**

Variables	Parameters	Data
Average Age		26.4 years
Gender	Male	73% (16)
	Female	27% (6)
Native City	Tier 1	9
	Tier 2	8
	Tier 3	5
Religion	Hindu	15
	Islam	3
	Buddhism	1
	Socialist	1
	Not Disclosed	2
Social Category	General	13
	OBC	2
	Not Disclosed	7
Highest Level of education	Graduate	7
	Post Graduate	15
Education Discipline of highest level of education	Engineers	12
	Law	2
	Medical	1
	Finance	1
	Science	2
	Arts and Public Relation	2
	Public Administration	2
Adult members graduate in family (%)		70 per cent
Work Experience (In Years) before fellowship program	No Work Experience	n = 8
	Work Experience	~12.95 months (n = 14)
Name of the sector(s) worked before joining fellowship program	IT	6
	Social	3
	Health	1
	Legal	2
	Manufacturing	2
	Associate	5
Designation	Analyst	3
	Technology Consultant	1
	Project Engineer	2
	Product Design Engineer	1
	Fellow	1

Source: Field Data

Joining a fellowship organization requires strong motivation, driven by personal values, career aspirations, and the desire for growth. When these needs are met, individuals remain engaged in the development sector. All respondents

aimed to create social impact and develop as leaders. Their decision to join fellowship organizations was influenced by personal experiences (Tavernier & Willoughby, 2012), societal perceptions, dissatisfaction with corporate roles

**Fig 2 Reasons For Joining Fellowship Organization**

Self-Transformation and Self-Identification	Job Dissatisfaction Before Joining Fellowship
Exploring unconventional organisations	Discrepancy between learned behaviour and social reality
Introspecting the Purpose of Life	Passion for field work – Experiencing Reality
Opportunity for Higher Education	Opportunity for Entrepreneurship and Intrapreneurship
Educating the uneducated	Networking
Opportunity to Learn, Gain Skills, and Create Impact	Opportunity to Impact Vulnerable Communities

Source: Primary Data

(Robbins et al., 2014), and the presence of role models. The key motivations for joining are summarized in Fig. 2.

*I. Self-Transformation & Self-Identification:* Advancements in technology and society have led a new generation to seek a deeper understanding of life’s purpose. One segment, having their basic needs met, pursues fellowship experiences to fulfill aspirations under expert mentorship (Allen et al., 2004), while another segment, despite unmet needs, also seeks such experiences. Throughout their journey, fellows explore the concept of “self,” identify areas for growth, and align with societal expectations. Traditional academic structures often hinder self-discovery (McKenzie, 2003), but fellowship programs encourage introspection and decision-making through regular debriefings, fostering per-

sonal transformation and uncovering new strengths (Cranton, 2006).

*II. Introspecting the Purpose of Life:* Fellows recognize the importance of reflection but often lack opportunities for self-examination (McKenzie, 2003). The fellowship provides a space for introspection, enabling fellows to identify weaknesses, learn from mistakes, and make conscious decisions. Regular reflection sessions help fellows leverage their strengths and manage weaknesses (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2008), fostering individual growth, improving group dynamics, and enhancing societal impact by clarifying the interconnections between various factors driving their efforts.

*III. Job Dissatisfaction Before Joining Fellowship:* Primary data indicates that nearly all fellows were significantly dissatisfied with their previous jobs, citing both financial and non-financial factors. These included monotonous tasks, lack of purpose, repetitive duties, limited decision-making power, and a diminished sense of fulfillment. Fellows felt surrounded by colleagues driven by financial gain and social prestige, while also facing societal and parental pressures. Additional sources of dissatisfaction included marginalization, resistance to new ideas, gender bias, and discrimination based on religion or social category. Many fellows also faced pressure to conform to mainstream societal norms, which they rejected.

*IV. Discrepancy Between Learned Be-*

*havior and Social Reality:* Fellows noted a disconnect between their education and societal realities, including within educational institutions and organizations. This cognitive dissonance led to confusion and prompted fellows to reevaluate their purpose. They also questioned the relentless pursuit of wealth, often at the expense of nature and its resources.

*V. Exploring Unconventional Organizations:* Approximately 25% of respondents chose the Gandhi Fellowship for its core values and principles (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). They emphasized the organization's focus on creating tangible impact and its unique hybrid model, blending corporate (capitalist) and NGO (socialist) approaches (Zadek, 2001). This model combines structured processes and systems, enabling fellows to grow effectively (Bocken et al., 2014).

*VI. Opportunity to Impact Vulnerable Communities:* Approximately 40% of fellows saw the fellowship as a chance to make a tangible impact on marginalized communities (Sen, 1999). Engaging with these communities and addressing their needs provided fellows with a deep sense of learning, community, and personal fulfillment (Chambers, 1997). Even small changes brought purpose and happiness, which they felt were absent in corporate roles. The desire to create a meaningful impact drove their decision to join fellowship organizations for a transformative experience.

*VII. Passion for Fieldwork – Experiencing Reality:* Research indicates that individuals join fellowship organizations to apply theoretical knowledge through hands-on experience, enabling them to design, develop, and implement interventions, fostering deep learning and self-discovery. Fellows highlighted that much of their learning is tacit, with regular debriefs enhancing reflection and insight. This process helps clarify their core purpose and prepares them for future decisions. Many sought experiential learning over traditional education, resonating with Terry Godwaldt's view, "Education without action is like food without exercise."

*VIII. Opportunity to Learn, Gain Skills, and Create Impact:* Approximately 65% of fellows reported that the fellowship exposes them to complex, unpredictable environments, enhancing professional and problem-solving skills as they implement structured systems in dynamic settings (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Senge, 2006). This experience improves skill development and impactful interventions. Interaction with diverse stakeholders boosts empathy and emotional intelligence, enabling fellows to design solutions that meet core needs. Fellows also develop digital competencies, including data management and presentation skills. Notably, 90% stated the fellowship cultivates leadership, empowering them to lead initiatives and collaborate effectively (Northouse, 2018).

*IX. Networking:* Primary research indicates that 65% of fellows view the fellowship as a valuable networking platform, connecting them with diverse, change-oriented stakeholders. The varied strengths and experiences foster collaboration and peer learning (Putnam, 2000), enhancing professional networks and building a lasting community.

*X. Opportunity for Higher Education:* Fellows noted that, while motivated to work in the social sector, they often lacked field experience. The fellowship provides essential hands-on exposure, valued by universities seeking candidates with practical sector knowledge (O'Connor, 2013). This real-world experience enhances academic readiness and appeals to institutions favoring students with practical insights (Boud & Solomon, 2001).

*XI. Opportunity for Entrepreneurship and Intrapreneurship:* Fellows reported that field immersion in the fellowship program helps identify grassroots gaps, assess community needs, and explore value-creation opportunities (Fowler, 2013). Through mentorship and stakeholder interactions, they gain insights that shape their entrepreneurial ideas (Dees, 1998). Some programs also provide opportunities for fellows to present ventures and secure implementation funding (Schultz & Jones, 2016).

*XII. Educating the Uneducated:* Fellows highlighted that “educating the

uneducated” extends beyond formal education for underprivileged communities; it involves fostering an environment where stakeholders critically engage with systemic issues (Freire, 2000). Over two years of field immersion, fellows exchange knowledge with communities, enhancing the ecosystem as a whole.

### **Fellowship Organization Characteristics**

The data reveals that 29% of the organizations studied were founded before 2010, 57% before 2020, and only one was established in 2020. Fellowship durations range from 10 months to 3 years, with most organizations offering a 2-year term.

1. *Geographical Coverage:* We examined the geographical coverage of fellowship organizations, which operate in 4 to 14 states and 1 Union Territory. Initially starting with about 20 fellows, most organizations have expanded to an average of 981 alumni, greatly enhancing their societal impact.

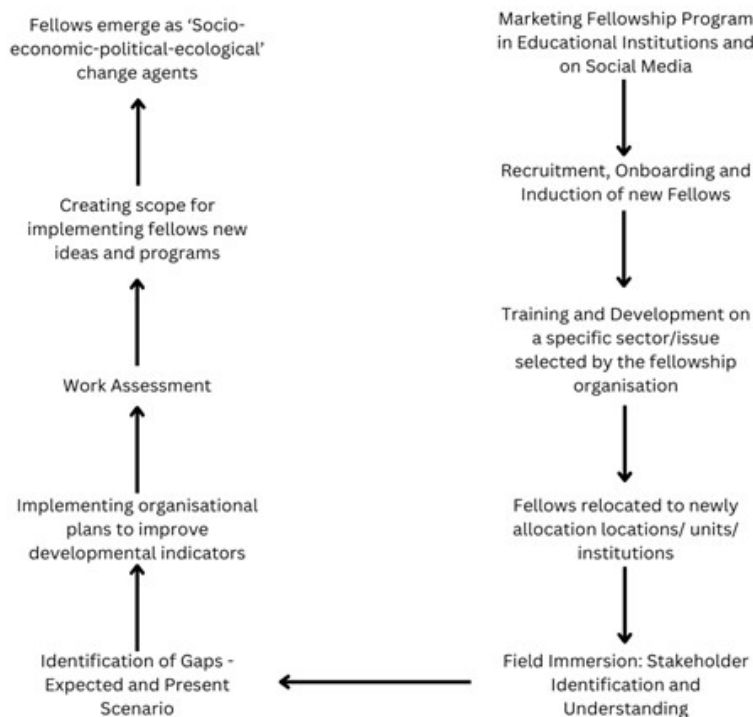
2. *Criteria to Offer Fellowship:* Eligibility criteria for fellowships vary but typically include age, citizenship, education, academic performance, and soft skills. Most fellowships target applicants aged 18–26, with 29% requiring Indian citizenship, another 29% accepting both Indian and overseas citizens of India, and the rest imposing no citizenship restriction. Seventy-one percent required at least a bachelor’s degree, with one targeting final-year undergraduates. Only

one fellowship requires 55% in 12th grade and prior work experience, while one specifies unmarried applicants. Soft skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, and resilience are universally emphasized.

3. *Fellowship Rewards to Fellows:* The fellowship organizations studied provide monthly stipends averaging ₹38,215.80, ranging from ₹14,000 to ₹60,000, depending on the organization's capacity, location, and fellowship terms. These stipends enable fellows to concentrate fully on their roles, supporting both their professional growth and the fellowship's goals.

4. *Recruitment, Onboarding, and Engagement of Fellows in the Fellowship Design:* Indian fellowship organizations follow a structured model that includes recruitment, training in change theory, impact assessment, and sustaining change. Recruitment occurs through state and non-state institutions, universities, colleges, and social media, followed by a multi-stage selection process. After onboarding, fellows undergo induction, regional placement, and immersion in organizational values. Some organizations provide direct field exposure before training, while others combine classroom learning with hands-on

Fig. 3 Recruitment, Onboarding, and Engagement of Fellows



Source: Created by the authors

experience. Fellow progress is closely monitored, with additional support offered to address competency gaps.

Fellowship organizations, with clearly defined goals and processes, assign fellows specific targets and timelines to apply their 'Theory of Change.' They are provided with preliminary plans, research materials, and assessment formats to implement change initiatives, identifying gaps between the current system and the ideal. Fellows are continuously monitored by mentors or regional representatives, and when organizational inputs do not align with on-ground realities, adjustments are proposed and shared across locations. These modifications enhance the fellows' approach to addressing gaps. The process leads to new ideas, with organizations providing the necessary resources and permissions for implementation. Post-implementation, the initiatives are reviewed, and feedback is given on their impact, positioning fellows as change agents in social, political, economic, and ecological contexts.

### **Organizational Environment, Systems & Processes: Fellow's Perception**

Fellows' experiences during their fellowship journey shape their perceptions of various organizational aspects (Robbins et al., 2014). Key themes that emerged from in-depth discussions with fellows are discussed below.

1. *Culture*: This research applies the Competing Values Leadership

Framework (Cameron et al., 2014), examining flexibility versus control and internal versus external orientation. It reveals that most fellowship organizations are collaborative, empathetic, and goal-driven, with many aligning with the "adhocracy" quadrant, promoting innovation. Cultural variations exist across sectors, sizes, and ages of organizations. Emerging cultural themes include: i) "The Clan" and "Adhocracy," emphasizing collaboration and flexibility, with organizations like SBI offering autonomy, while TFI and Gandhi Fellowship provide structured placements; ii) "The Clan" and "Hierarchy," as seen in LAMP, blending collaboration with efficiency; iii) "The Adhocracy," prioritizing innovation, as observed in Social Alpha and MGNF. These cultural adaptations influence organizational success and alignment with sustainable development goals.

**Most fellowship organizations are collaborative, empathetic, and goal-driven, with many aligning with the "adhocracy" quadrant, promoting innovation.**

2. *Diversity and Inclusivity*: Helmold (2021) argues that diversity improves organizational efficiency by enhancing problem-solving and fostering innovation, with gender diversity boosting productivity and returns (Joshi & Pant, 2015). The organizations studied demonstrated strong diversity and inclusiveness, with fellows represent-

ing varied ages, academic backgrounds, work experiences, ethnicities, and a gender-balanced environment. TFI and Gandhi Fellowship had more female fellows. Fellows from LAMP noted that diversity enriched learning and broadened perspectives. Organizational size influenced inclusivity, with MGNF involving fellows in decision-making early, while TFI and Gandhi Fellowship sought feedback in later stages. However, some fellows pointed out that processes like Social Alpha's English-language exams could disadvantage candidates with language barriers.

3. *Alignment of Values:* Suar and Khuntia (2010) suggest that a strong alignment of values between members and their organization enhances engagement and productivity. Fellows consistently noted that their fellowship organizations align with these values, with senior leadership exemplifying the principle of "walk the talk." Furthermore, ethics are embedded in 75% of the organizations' value systems. Approximately three-quarters of the interviewed fellows reported that their organizations effectively balance ethics and efficiency.
4. *Values Embedded in Systems and Processes:* All the studied fellowship organizations demonstrate a strong integration of their values within their systems and processes. The selection criteria for fellows in the Gandhi Fellowship, TFI, MGNF, Vision India, and SBI Fellowship emphasize value alignment. Additionally, fellows noted that TFI has implemented various policies to uphold and govern the organization's values and ethics.
5. *Awareness of Values:* Fellowship organizations like Teach for India and the Gandhi Fellowship conduct orientation programs to train fellows on their core values. TFI also hosts regular city meet collaboration events to reinforce these values throughout the fellowship. However, nearly 40% of Gandhi Fellowship participants noted that, due to the organization's growth phase (Greiner's model), new members often lack sensitivity to the core values and culture, leading to discrepancies between written policies and on-ground implementation.
6. *Debrief Session:* Fellows from the Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship (MGNF) noted the absence of a formal induction program on values, but emphasized that debrief sessions with professors help integrate these values into their decision-making. As the organization is still in its early stages, there is room for improvement in aligning values. Clear communication and articulation of organizational values, along with encouraging alignment in daily behavior, are essential for achieving overall success.
7. *Management Capabilities:* The non-governmental sector has evolved, with Dart (2004) suggesting that organizations must adopt structured, "business-like" systems to meet

stakeholder needs. Visionary leaders often face challenges in managerial capabilities, particularly in prioritization and trade-off management (Stid & Bradach, 2009). Managerial capability includes the expertise and processes needed to execute programs effectively. This study evaluates management capabilities within fellowship organizations using Yukl's (2012) leadership taxonomy: task-oriented, relations-oriented, and change-related.

8. *Task-Oriented Behavior*: Fellows reported high expertise, planning, and problem-solving skills across organizations. Vision India fellows highlighted the recruitment of experts, while SBI fellows praised planning clarity. Social Alpha fellows noted efficient operations, and TFI's quick adaptation to online education during the pandemic was commended. LAMP and MGNF fellows noted effective operational management by PRS Legislative Research and IIM Bangalore. *Relations-Oriented Behavior*: Fellows observed strong interdepartmental collaboration and noted care and empathy from employees, creating a supportive environment, especially in Gandhi Fellowship and TFI. *Change-Oriented Behavior*: Gandhi Fellowship fellows emphasized innovation through self-directed inquiry, while Social Alpha fellows also noted strong encouragement for innovation. Both Gandhi and TFI fellows recognized employees' role in promoting collective learning.
9. *Alignment between mission, vision, and daily operations*: Mission statements are crucial for aligning organizational purpose with stakeholders (Bartkus et al., 2000; Darbi, 2012). Successful organizations need coherence between purpose, philosophy, strategy, and management systems (Trevor & Varcoe, 2017). Fellows across organizations reported alignment between mission, vision, and philosophy. However, 20% of TFI fellows expressed concerns about an overemphasis on documented outcomes, while some Gandhi and TFI fellows noted challenges in managing resource trade-offs and balancing immediate and long-term objectives as their organizations grow.
10. *Scope for Innovation*: Non-profit organizations foster creativity by focusing on purpose and process, enhancing innovation capacity (Spruijt et al., 2013). Fellows in the studied organizations reported numerous innovation opportunities, such as Be the Change Project, InnovatED, and TFIx. These programs support fellows through problem identification, ideation, and implementation, in collaboration with IIM Bangalore. Teach for India's 2019 report highlights TFIx's educational equity goal, incubating 23 education leaders across three years, training 394 fellows, and impacting over 31,000 children. Similarly, Gandhi Fellowship fellows drive innovation in schools and communities, while SBI fellows highlighted significant innovation, including the "Pani Foundation" project. Fellows across programs

demonstrate strong risk-taking and alignment with stakeholder perspectives (Dees, 1998).

11. *Resources for Implementing Innovation:* All Social Alpha fellows noted substantial support for innovation, highlighted by access to various lab facilities and guidance from faculty members and field experts. Similarly, MGNF fellows mentioned access to the NSR cell, which focuses on entrepreneurship. One fellow remarked, “Anyone can walk in with an idea, and they will sit down to brainstorm with you, enroll you in the startup program, and help you build your own company.”
12. *Scope for Learning and Development:* Volini et al. (2019) highlight the critical 21st-century skills, such as leading through complexity and speed, which fellows develop across organizations. Gandhi Fellows, for example, use a “Plan, Act, Reflect, Share” framework during their Village/Slum Immersion, fostering empathy and insight into community challenges. Teach for India (TFI) addresses taboo topics like mental health and menstrual hygiene, encouraging open dialogue. At Vision India Foundation, fellows engage in self-directed learning via Individual Development Plans, setting goals for research and networking, with monthly training sessions focusing on reflection and collaboration, and the second year refining critical skills.
13. *Conflict Management and Negotiation:* Fellows reported effective

grievance redressal within organizations, with minimal personal conflicts. Gandhi Fellows emphasized collaboration and assertive communication in navigating stakeholder conflicts, with “Influence Without Authority” being a key competency. Some TFI fellows, however, expressed concerns about the fellowship’s focus on stakeholder relations, noting that the organization did not sufficiently support fellows in conflicts with school headmasters.

## Conclusion

State interventions for vulnerable populations often fall short of long-term impact due to flawed design, political influences, and social complexities. Individual and civil society efforts, though impactful, lack scalability. In contrast, fellowship organizations in India significantly drive sustainable social change by aligning fellows’ goals with organizational values, fostering leadership, and addressing systemic gaps. Governments should prioritize fellowship organizations, which bridge state and grassroots efforts and enhance leadership and community engagement. Policies should provide financial and institutional support to sustain these programs, promote partnerships, and develop capacity-building initiatives that

**Fellowship organizations in India significantly drive sustainable social change by aligning fellows’ goals with organizational values, fostering leadership, and addressing systemic gaps.**

prepare fellows for leadership across sectors. Policy support should extend to educational incentives, research funding, and career opportunities for alumni, and emphasize transparency, inclusivity, and ethical practices in public-private partnerships. Empowering fellowship programs to implement targeted interventions in education, healthcare, and livelihoods in underserved regions is vital. Furthermore, policies should support data-driven social innovation, using documented outcomes to guide future program designs, ensuring continuous improvement in addressing systemic issues and advancing SDGs.

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